



Early Career Scientist Award 2024 Dr. Jacqueline Benson McRoberts

By Henry A. Cordoba-Novoa



Jacqueline (Jaci) Benson McRoberts currently serves as Head of Data Stewardship and Digital Enablement on the Data Science and Engineering Capability Center in Vegetable R&D, *Bayer Crop Science*. She leads the team to build Information Technology (IT) strategy and design, launch and support the organization's digital workflows. This builds solutions for predictive breeding analytics, trialing, nursery and lab operations with a secure data foundation enabling improved decision-making and efficiency. As a result, growers and consumers benefit from improved vegetable varieties faster.

Benson McRoberts strives to have meaningful impact on global food security through plant breeding, analytics and digital enablement. She thrives in roles that allow her to see new possibilities, collaborate, build strategy and implement with results-orientation. As a relator with a positive, strategic mindset and servant leadership style, she has engaged deeply across functions for over 10 years at Bayer Crop Science.

What do you think has been the cornerstone of your career so far?

There hasn't been one single role that I can think of as a cornerstone to my career but instead one approach that has consistently proven fundamental to advancing my career. This is a willingness to explore different parts of the company and/or jump into projects that are conceptually new but that requires at least some of the skills that I've gained through previous experiences. If a new role or responsibility grips your curiosity, don't be afraid to say "yes". I like to targets closer to a 60% fit and consider the 40% new learnings and growth opportunities as long as it's the direction that I'd like to develop.

What is your current personal or professional motto? What inspires you the most these days?

"Servant Leadership" speaks most to me as a "motto" both professionally and personally. I grew up in a military family and community service was a fundamental component of my upbringing. I've carried this with me into the career space and make it my priority to be of service to my team and peers and help to create a thriving community. It really fills my bucket day to day.



What piece of advice would you give to scientists starting or about to start their professional path?

Advice for someone starting out would be to find a company whose vision aligns with you own and a role that you can see yourself playing well. Think what would you do in that role that might even be different or in addition to the role's description. It's important that you can be successful in your first role, put in the hard work, stay focused and make a name for yourself through your deliverables but also don't forget to grow your network, this part is key. You will become that person someone thinks of for their team because they are aware of your performance and potential.